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Meddling At Home

When Congress established the Central Intelligence Agency in 1947 under provisions of the National Security Act, it did so in response to what was perceived as a worldwide Communist threat, one that was both conspiratorial and cloaked in secrecy. Because the threat to the United States was external and because a domestic spy force is abhorrent to a democratic society, Congress wrote specific safeguards into the legislation prohibiting the CIA from having "police, subpena, law-enforcement powers or internal security functions."

With the agency's admission to Representative Koch of New York that it has provided training to police officers of a dozen city and county police departments, it has become clear that the CIA has not hesitated to disobey this injunction. Because of the broad charter granted to the CIA and its need to operate covertly, Congress has always been reluctant to examine its frequently intrusive and mischievous operations abroad; and earlier disclosures of domestic CIA activities, such as its penetration of the National Student Association, have not resulted in greater congressional control of the agency.

The time has come to assert such control or at the very least to require the CIA to be more accountable for its operations. If it has trained police in handling explosives and in organizing intelligence files, what else, if anything, has the CIA been up to at home? A bill that would require the agency to make periodic reports of its activities to selected committees of Congress unfortunately died in the Senate last session. It should be revived and passed.

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